



# CAPTivations

## Success Stories in Prevention

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### Westside School District (EVERY-1)

Students in the Westside School District in Omaha, Nebraska, are benefiting from an educational program that teaches them that most of their peers are not using drugs and alcohol.

"We've ended our fourth year of All Stars, so our first-year kids will be juniors this fall," observes Kathy Nellor, coordinator of EVERY-1, the school district's drug abuse prevention program. "That class has gone through the system with flying colors. We look at how many are non users or low users, and 90 percent are either not using or are low users."

Westside School District, which is named after "Westside Story," is a suburban school district of about 5,300 students located in central Omaha. The school consists of 10 elementary schools, one middle school (grades 7 and 8) and one high school (grades 9-12). The population is roughly 85 percent white, 10 percent black, 3 percent Asian, and 2 percent Native American.

Ron Abdouch, director of drug free schools and mentoring, said the economy in the school district, as in the rest of Omaha, is fairly stable, relying on agriculture and large business.

The primary drugs used by the youth in the community are alcohol, tobacco, and marijuana, Nellor and Abdouch explained. The community has little problem with inhalants and with Ecstasy, particularly since law enforcement has cracked down on raves.

"We've seen a 10 percent decrease in the use of those, while nationally, the numbers have gone up," Abdouch said.

The Westside School District has been part of the Omaha Community Partnership since 1991, and the two groups collaborated to submit the grant to the federal Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. The grant is expected to run through 2004.

One of the main components of EVERY-1 is "All Stars," a seventh-grade classroom program designed to delay the onset of alcohol and other drug use. The program, Nellor points out,

focuses on four core strategies:

1. **Normative beliefs:** Kids learn from each other that not everyone thinks it's cool to drink or take drugs, and not everyone is doing it. They also learn that not everyone thinks violence is the way to solve problems, Nellor said.
2. **Commitment:** Students voluntarily sign commitment forms agreeing to certain behaviors. These are not standard forms, Nellor said. Students can decide for themselves what they will commit to. Some students, for example, might commit to not drinking until they are 17, or they might commit to waiting until they are 21. They may commit to not smoking at all, or wait until they are 18. Counselors work with them to help them with their commitments, but it is up to the students to keep their commitments.
3. **Pro-social bonding:** Students are encouraged to develop relationships with adults in the school. The idea, Nellor said, is for them to feel as though they belong to the school and the community.
4. **Ideals:** The program teaches students that actions they take now will have an effect on their future. The program helps the students think about what their future will look like and what they can do to ensure the best future possible.

All Stars is presented to seventh graders in 14 45-minute classroom sessions, with interactive group activities, small group



discussions, art projects, and other hands-on activities. The program even includes a graduation ceremony.

In eighth grade, the students have a booster program, where they look at their commitments and see how they are maintaining their goals.

Nellor said the All Stars program has ended its fourth year with the 2002-2003 school year, and the first class that participated will be juniors in the 2003-2004 school year.

The school district uses the American Drug Abuse Survey to measure the results of All Stars and the other programs under EVERY-1. In 2002, when the first class who used the All Stars curriculum was in ninth grade, 19 percent had used alcohol in the past 30 days, 13 percent had smoked tobacco, and 5 percent had used marijuana. In 1998, 36 percent of ninth graders then had used alcohol in the last 30 days, 32 percent had smoked tobacco, and 21 percent had used marijuana.

Among eighth graders in 2002, 14 percent had used alcohol in the last 30 days, 11 percent had used tobacco, and 10 percent had used marijuana. This compares to eighth graders in 1998, when 31 percent reported using alcohol in the last 30 days, 30 percent had used tobacco, and 17 percent used marijuana.

Seventh grade numbers also showed a decrease. In 2002, eight percent said they had used alcohol in the last 30 days, five percent said they'd used tobacco, and three percent said they'd used marijuana. In 1998, the 19 percent of seventh graders said they'd drunk alcohol in the last 30 days, 18 percent said they'd used tobacco, and eight percent said they had used marijuana.

The numbers for 10<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> graders also decreased, but not as drastically as they had for those

who had been exposed to the All Stars program. For example, 12<sup>th</sup> graders in 2002 reported that 47 percent of them had drunk alcohol in the last 30 days, 34 percent had used tobacco, and 20 percent had used marijuana. In 1998, 55 percent said they had consumed alcohol in the last 30 days, 43 percent said they had used tobacco, and 23 percent said they had used marijuana.

EVERY-1 last year implemented All Stars Junior in eight fourth and fifth grade classrooms, to send the message to younger children, Nellor said. The younger children don't sign the pledges, but they do learn about the normative values—that most kids are not taking drugs or drinking alcohol—and they get to do surveys on such questions as whether it's okay to steal. They use the information in science class to learn how to make bar graphs.

"They learn character development by observing their peers," she states. "They learn what is and isn't appropriate behavior."

An additional focus of the district is a

Host Mentoring program. Adult volunteers from the community meet with selected students in one of the elementary schools, as well as the middle school and the high school, to work

one on one with them on reading skills and life skills.

The funding also supports for the coordination of a Safe Homes program. Parents sign up to be on a directory of alcohol, drug, and violence-free homes, where activities will be supervised, and no drugs or alcohol will be used. The school district puts the directory together and hands it out to the students. The participating families also get window stickers. Both the public schools and the surrounding private and parochial schools participate, Abdouch said.

The Safe Homes program has been in effect for two years, Nellor notes. The first year had 443 participants; the second year, that number rose to 617. Nellor hopes for more participation in the 2003-2004 school year as word about it spreads.

## **"They learn character development by observing their peers..."**



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### **Resources:**

Center for Substance Abuse Prevention  
[www.samhsa.gov/centers/csap/csap.html](http://www.samhsa.gov/centers/csap/csap.html)

Decision Support System  
[www.preventiondss.org](http://www.preventiondss.org)

Join Together  
[www.jointogether.org](http://www.jointogether.org)

Community Anti-Drug Coalitions of America  
[www.cadca.org](http://www.cadca.org)

CSAP's Model Programs  
<http://modelprograms.samhsa.gov>

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